

Judaism: Ten Points
Rabbi Dennis C. Sasso

1. JUDAISM is the "evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people."
(Mordecai M. Kaplan)
Believing, Behaving, Belonging

2. HISTORIC PERIODS

Biblical (2000 BCE – 70 CE)
Rabbinic (70 – 700 CE)
Medieval (700 – 1750)
Modern (1750 – present)

3. HEBREWS (Abraham)
ISRAEL(ites) (Jacob/Israel) and
JEWS (Judah/Judeans)

4. BASIC VALUES

- Where are you? (Genesis 3:9)
Where is your brother...? (Genesis 4:9)
Am I my brother's keeper? (Genesis 4:9)
- And God created the human (ha-adam) in the divine image; ... male and female God created them (Genesis 1:27).
- Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Ehad
Hear O Israel: the Eternal our God, the Eternal is One.
Love the Eternal your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might
(Deuteronomy 6:4-5).
- Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18).
- The stranger (foreigner) among you shall be unto you as the native born. Love the stranger (foreigner), for you were strangers (foreigners) in the land of Mitzrayim (Lev. 19:34, et passim. – 36x in the Torah).
- Do not do unto others what is hurtful to you.
This is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary.
Go fulfill it.

If I am not for myself,
who will be for me?
If I am only for myself,
what am I?
If not now,
when?

(Hillel, 1st Cent. BCE)

5. BASIC VALUES VOCABULARY

- Torah - "Teaching"
Torah refers both to the Written Scriptures and to the Oral tradition of the Rabbinic sages.
The term encompasses Jewish Learning and Living.
- TaNaKh: Torah (the Pentateuch)
Nevi'im (Prophets)
Ketuvim (Writings)
- B'rit - Covenant (relationship of mutual accountability and responsibility, with God and community).
- Mitzvah (pl., Mitzvot) - Commandment, religious duty or obligation, ritual and ethical.
- Tzedek / Tzedakah - Act of justice or righteousness (also, philanthropic giving).
- Hesed - deed of loving kindness
- Tikkun Olam - to repair or improve the world
- Shalom - Peace (personal and societal)
Greeting: Shalom Aleikhem - Peace be with You.
- Kadosh/Kedusha - Holiness
"You shall be holy for I, the Eternal your God, am holy." (Lev. 19: 2)
"You shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Lev 19: 6)
- B'rakha -
"Go forth...and be a blessing" (Genesis 12)

Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha'olam - Blessed are You, Eternal our God, the Sovereign/Source of all creation.....(Liturgy)

Yevarekhekha Adonai V'yishmerekha -"May the Eternal bless and protect you; May the Eternal's presence shine upon you with love; May the Eternal's presence be lifted toward you and grant you peace."
(Numbers 6: 22-26).
- Olam Hazeh / Olam Habah – This world/world to come
- Mashiah / Aharit Hayamim – Messiah/end times

6. THE YEARLY CYCLE

Holy Days of Torah Origin

SHABBAT - weekly celebration of creation and freedom:

DAYS OF AWE - High Holy Days

ROSH HASHANAH - New Year - Renewal of Creation (5778)

YOM KIPPUR - Day of Atonement

SEASONAL FESTIVALS

SUKKOT - Tabernacles or Booths (Journey/Thanksgiving)

PESAH - Passover (Festival of Freedom)

SHAVUOT - Weeks or Pentecost (Revelation of Torah at Sinai)

Biblical and post-biblical holidays:

PURIM (Book of Esther)

HANNUKAH (Books of Maccabees)

TISHA B'AV - Remembrance of destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple:
(Babylonians, 586 BCE; Romans, 70 CE)

TU BISHVAT - New Year of Trees

Modern Days of Remembrance and celebration:

YOM HASHOA V'HAGEVURAH - Holocaust Remembrance

YOM HA'ATZMAUT- Israel Independence Day

7. LIFE CYCLE

- Birth - naming celebration and welcoming of child to the Covenanted community (B'rit Milah & B'rit Habat).
- Childhood - Ceremony of consecration to religious education.
- Adolescence - Bar/Bat Mitzvah. 13 is the age of religious responsibility.
- Confirmation - teen group ceremony of commitment to Jewish life.
- Conversion - Ger Tzedek, a righteous proselyte.
- Marriage - Erusin and Kiddushin. Ketubah is the marriage writ.
- Divorce - Gerushin (Get - divorce document).
- Death - Funeral and Mourning- Kaddish prayer - Shiva, Sheloshim, Yahrzeit.

8. WAYS OF BEING JEWISH

Major religious streams:

Orthodox (includes Hasidic)

Conservative

Reconstructionist

Reform

Other:

Humanistic

Cultural

Secular

Zionist

Etc.

9. SANCTUARIES

The Temple in Jerusalem once served as the center of religious life.

Following the destruction of the Sanctuary (1st c.), Jewish life was sanctified in various other settings, whether in the Land of Israel or the diaspora:

- Home - (Mikdash me'at - the Small Sanctuary)
- Synagogue - (Beit Keneset, Beit Midrash, Beit Tefilah – House of Fellowship, Study and Prayer)
- Kehilah - Community institutions: Jewish Federation and agencies.
- The Land of Israel
- The World

10. JEWISH IDENTITY

Who Is A Jew?

One can be a Jew by birth or by choice (conversion). Central to Jewish identity are:

- The identification of oneself as a Jew, i.e. the acceptance of the Jewish People with its past, its present and its future as one's People;
- Belief in the spiritual values of the Jewish tradition, i.e. the conviction that the Jewish spiritual heritage affords inspiration for living, and constitutes a worthy contribution to the totality of humanity's spiritual wisdom; and
- Participation in Jewish life, i.e. contributing to the perpetuation of the Jewish People and the advancement of its civilization.

The ancient Rabbis teach that Torah... "Is not subject to inheritance. Each generation must assume it anew." Converts address God in worship in the same terms as born Jews, "Our God and God of our ancestors..." because Jews by choice are as Jews by birth (*na-asu ikkar K'yisrael*).

(Adapted from *Questions Jews Ask* by Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan)

Journeys

The history of the Jews is one of sacred migrations and forced migrations, a constant journeying. It begins with the divine command to Abraham and Sarah: "Go forth to the land that I will show you..." (Genesis 12). Generations later, an oppressive Pharaoh was told: "Let my people go!" (Exodus 5:1, et al.)

Our historic narrative has been defined by homecoming and diaspora; dispersion and return. I am a Sephardic Jew. My family history brought me to the Americas escaping the Inquisition in 1492. My ancestors settled in the Caribbean islands (Curacao and St. Thomas) and eventually Central America. Born in Panama, I immigrated, married and raised my family in the United States. My wife, Sandy, is of Askenazic heritage. Her family emigrated from Eastern Europe escaping pogroms and an impending Holocaust, which not all were able to survive.

The history of Judaism is at the same time particular and universal. Jews have both absorbed the influences and helped to shape the quality of the lives of many nations. To be a Jew is to be pilgrim and native, resident and immigrant. Judaism is the faithful and evolving journey of the Jewish people to fulfill Abraham and Sarah's call "Go forth...and be a blessing..." today, in Indianapolis.

(Rabbi Dennis C. Sasso)